



Kay Ivey
Governor



Graham L. Sisson, Jr.
Executive Director

State of Alabama Governor's Office on Disability FY 2020



It's All GOOD



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**The Honorable
Kay Ivey
Governor
State of Alabama**



KAY IVEY, GOVERNOR
STATE OF ALABAMA

The work contained in this annual report shows how the Governor's Office on Disability (GOOD) is successfully helping the more than 550,000 people in Alabama living with a disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). I rely on GOOD to provide reliable and helpful information on disability resources and the unmet needs of affected Alabamians. My administration is committed to increasing opportunities for people with disabilities in Alabama as well as increasing employment opportunities through the Governor's Job Fair for People with Disabilities. GOOD is an excellent resource. If you need assistance with disability-related issues, please do not hesitate to contact the Governor's Office on Disability.

Kay Ivey



Dr. Graham L. Sisson, Jr. and Governor Kay Ivey

Dr. Graham L. Sisson, Jr., Executive Director

Graham was appointed as Executive Director of the Governor's Office on Disability in October 2007 and was reappointed in January 2011. He received his Bachelor of Science degree from the University of North Alabama in Accounting in 1987. Graham also attended Vanderbilt University and was awarded his Juris Doctorate in 1990. He was admitted to the Alabama State Bar in 1990. He received a certificate in Rehabilitation Leadership and Management from Auburn University in May, 2009. Graham served as an adjunct law professor teaching a disability law course at the Birmingham School of Law and taught a doctoral course in disability law and history at Auburn University. Graham is a 2016 graduate of Auburn University with a PhD in Rehabilitation, Counseling, and Leadership. He has lived with a disability since 1982.

Letter from Dr. Sisson

I would like to thank the Governor and the Alabama Legislature for their continuing support of GOOD.

Fiscal Year 2020 has been another year of positive growth and change for the office. GOOD continues to maintain nine local advisory committees around the state which provide grassroots input about unmet needs of Alabamians with disabilities and increases the visibility of the office. GOOD partners with these local advisory groups to facilitate the GOOD mission statement and strategic plan and obtain information at the grassroots level. GOOD will continue to monitor the unmet needs of Alabamians with disabilities as related to the COVID 19 pandemic.

The GOOD website has been revised to be even more user-friendly and includes additional resources.

GOOD is available to do training, accessibility surveying, and speaking at meetings or seminars at no cost. To schedule training, speaking engagements, or surveying, call GOOD's Toll Free Number at 888-879-3582. Meetings continue to be held with other state agencies to foster collaboration and maximize state resources for people with disabilities. A special thanks is again given to the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services for its close partnership with GOOD.

Information about disability issues and training continues to be disseminated throughout the state. Awareness is a powerful tool which leads to greater access for individuals with disabilities. GOOD continues its role of dispensing accurate information. Join the GOOD list by accessing the appropriate icon on GOOD's website at www.good.alabama.gov.

GOOD's Toll-Free Number is 888-879-3582 for consumers or anyone interested in information, referrals, and resources for people with disabilities in Alabama.

We look forward to the progression and inclusion of Alabamians with disabilities in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Dr. Graham L. Sisson, Jr.

GOOD Overview

The Governor's Office on Disability was created by Executive Order Number 43 in 1999. It was formed to serve as a statewide clearing house for information on disability and resources in Alabama. Its other major function is to act as a liaison to the Governor's Office on disability issues.

The Governor's Office on Disability's mission statement was revised in 2008 as follows:

“Facilitate the inclusion of Alabamians with disabilities in education, employment, housing, transportation, healthcare, and leisure.”

Executive Order 15 in 2011 re-established the Governor's Office on Disability under the new administration. Because resources are scarce in Alabama, the Governor's Office on Disability seeks to maximize disability resources by identifying existing ones and fostering collaboration among public and private entities that serve people with disabilities.

The Governor's Office on Disability actively seeks to engage communication between individuals with disabilities and their families and entities that provide services to them. GOOD's website, www.good.alabama.gov, is one tool that is being expanded to facilitate open dialogue and access on disability resources and issues. To foster communication even more, GOOD developed a list serve. Anyone interested in issues affecting people with disabilities can join the GOOD list by accessing the website at www.good.alabama.gov, clicking the “Join the GOOD List” icon and entering in personal contact and email information. Periodically, cutting edge information on disability will be shared with list members.

Strategic Plan

(1) Legislation Initiative

Monitor Alabama's disability related legislation and policies and provide policy analysis to the Governor.

Objective 1: Monitor constituent issues with regard to policy formulation and recommendations for legislation.

Objective 2: Serve as a liaison to the Governor on all necessary matters of interest related to the GOOD mission.

(2) Collaboration Initiative

Establish a united voice to determine and meet the needs of the GOOD mission.

Objective 1: Utilize local advisory committees to determine the unmet needs of Alabamians with disabilities.

Objective 2: Partner with public and private entities, inclusive of state agencies, that advance the achievement of the GOOD mission.

Objective 3: To accept and resolve referrals regarding disability issues from the Governor's Constituent Affairs Office and other referral resources.

(3) Consultation Initiative

Serve as advisor on public disability-related issues in Alabama.

Objective 1: Provide informal legal opinions on disability issues to the Governor's Legal Office.

Objective 2: Provide analytical information to the Governor's Legal Office relative to the GOOD mission.

Objective 3: Act as an expert resource regarding the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and related laws.

(4) Dissemination Initiative

Promote public awareness of actions and activities in fulfilling GOOD's mission.

Objective 1: Increase effective utilization of available resources for Alabamians with disabilities.

Objective 2: Establish a website as the primary dissemination method of GOOD actions, activities and publications.

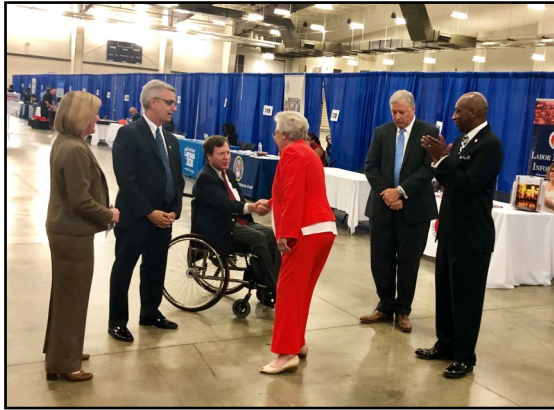
Objective 3: Promote local and/or statewide media coverage of GOOD's actions and activities when possible.

Governor's Office on Disability

Goals and Accomplishments for FY 2020

I. Disability Recognition, Summits, Conferences, and Job Fairs

- GOOD partnered with the Governor's Office and other agencies in the Governor's Job Fair for People with Disabilities held in Montgomery 10/3/2019. Approximately 1,100 jobseekers attended the Montgomery event. This marked the third year for the Governor's Disability Employment Summit. The first was held in Mobile and the second in Huntsville.



Credit Governor Kay Ivey's Office

Pictured left to right: Commissioner Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, President Dr. John Mascia with the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind, Executive Director Dr. Graham L. Sisson, Jr. with the Governor's Office on Disability, the honorable Governor Kay Ivey, and Secretary Fitzgerald Washington with the Alabama Department of Labor.

II. Convening Disability Consumer Advisory Councils

- 9 Regional Council Meetings during each fiscal year
 - Because of the COVID 19 pandemic, we surveyed the members of the local advisory groups to seek their input on the following:
 - Would you be able to participate in a telephone conference call or Zoom meeting?
 - How has the pandemic affected you personally and if so, how?
 - Is there anything you think GOOD can do to assist you during this time?
 - What items would you like to see on the next meeting's agenda?
 - Are there any specific topics / speakers you would like to present at the next or future meetings?
 - Based on the survey responses, we held our meetings via Zoom and conference call and had excellent attendance and outstanding participation. We are incorporating the responses in GOOD's day to day operations. We will use the comments and suggestions in the format of our future meetings and incorporate the suggestions for meeting topics and speakers.

III. Trainings/Disability Awareness

ADA

- In collaboration with the Alabama's ADA toll free information services conducted in FY 2020:
 - 29 ADA Trainings
 - 20 Accessibility Reviews/Consultations
- Dr. Graham Sisson's contributions to the renovation of the Vulcan in Birmingham was featured in the magazine *Capitol Ideas* in their edition dedicated to Celebrating 30 years of the ADA. Dr. Sisson's article is below:



Vulcan, the world's tallest cast iron statue, stands on a hill overlooking Birmingham, Alabama. For some, the statue evokes the city's industrial past. For Dr. Graham Sisson, it's also an illustration of what he's been saying for decades: Accessibility is a win for everyone.

As executive director of the Alabama Governor's Office on Disability (GOOD), a deputy attorney general for the state of Alabama and the state's ADA coordinator, Sisson has devoted his career to advocating for people with disabilities. When a recent renovation of the Vulcan statue sought to remove an unsightly elevator, he negotiated with the parties involved to build a new elevator in a less conspicuous position. Far from being a detraction, the elevator was a hit.

"Most people don't use the stairs; most people are going to use the elevator," Sisson said. "It's one of those things that's made it even more of an attraction. That's the ideal situation — where the Americans with Disabilities Act can work, where it's not an undue burden, and you can actually come up with something that's even better than what you had before."

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 has been a touchstone throughout Sisson's personal life and career. In 1982, two days before he was scheduled to report to Cadet Basic Training at West Point, he was hit by a drunk driver while a passenger. He woke up from an eight-week coma to find that he was paralyzed from the waist down. Sisson attended the University of North Alabama, serving as student government association president and graduating with honors. During law school at Vanderbilt, Sisson wrote his third-year thesis on the ADA, which was signed into law the month after he graduated.

"I was introduced to [the ADA] very quickly and did a lot of research on it," Sisson said. "It means a lot. It's the premier civil rights law, I think, for people with disabilities, and it's all about mainstreaming and inclusion, which mean a lot to me — having the same opportunities as anyone else, despite having a disability."

Both in private law practice and in government roles, Sisson has dedicated his life to advocating for people with disabilities. As executive director of GOOD, Sisson advances

accessibility in a host of ways, from providing technical assistance to providing information about ADA compliance to ensuring that government communication provides accessible options.

"It excites me that I get to actually make a difference," Sisson said. "When I help to make sure something is accessible, a building is constructed in the correct way, make sure that people with disabilities are included, that's exciting to me, because I immediately get to see a good, positive result from that."

Disability advocacy is a constant effort, Sisson said. One lesson he's learned — open communication and consensus building are powerful means of change.

"The most effective tool is not necessarily suing an entity because they don't comply with the ADA," Sisson said. "I think the best way is to try to create understanding and awareness. In other words, don't do it because the law says you have to do it — do it because it's the right thing to do. It's a win-win situation."

Governor's Office on Disability

Goals and Accomplishments for FY 2020

III. Trainings/Disability Awareness (Continued)

- Dr. Graham Sisson is chair of the Alabama Trails Commission and was a presenter at the 2020 Alabama Recreational Trails Conference. He was featured in and narrated an 'Accessible Parks make Inclusive Parks' YouTube video produced by the National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD). Click on the YouTube link below:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_h52u6LXJM&fbclid=IwAR2-EhsNTI1BrVj5RHsOmIfHUNiluO1It8J6QCxl7FeGh2ypWf1KYQrhXoY



“My goal and my dream is that you can go to any major public attraction like a park and not have to worry about accessibility. You just show up like everybody else does.”



IV. Information and Referral

- Number of inquiries on disability issues FY 2020
 - ◆ 701 inquiries

V. Website

- Continuously updating website, resources, and corresponding with members on the GOOD list

VI. Legislation Initiative

- GOOD continued to work on legislation to address unmet needs of Alabamians with disabilities. One such piece of legislation is the Alabama Work Opportunity Tax Credit for hiring individuals with disabilities. This bill was not introduced in the 2020 legislative session, but plans are being made to introduce in an upcoming legislative session.

VII. FAND—Functional and Access Needs in Disasters Task Force

GOOD took a leadership role in this statewide taskforce in 2013 and continued through 2020. Originally named the Special Populations Taskforce, it was renamed Functional and Access Needs in Disaster to accurately reflect its purpose of ensuring Alabamians with functional and accessible needs are not only considered, but included in all phases of emergency management.

Dr. Sisson co-chairs this group along with Gretchen Richards, Ph.D. from Jacksonville State University. Dr. Sisson continues to serve as liaison between FAND and the Governor's Mass Care and Sheltering Taskforce. Those interested in joining this effort should contact Dr. Sisson at 800-441-7607 extension 7189.

FY 2020 Budget

Personnel Costs	\$53,354
Employee Benefits	\$23,011
Travel-in-State	\$131
Travel Out-of-State	0
Repairs & Maintenance	\$1,110
Rentals & Leases	0
Utilities & Communications	\$114
Professional Services	\$1,753
Supplies, Materials & Operating Expenses	\$2,864
Grants & Benefits	\$19,439
Other Equipment Purchases	0
Total	\$101,776

FY 2020 Smart Budget

Number of Inquiries—Projected 1100, Actual 701

Number responded to within 72 hours—Projected 100%, Actual 100%

Governor's Office on Disability

Goals and Accomplishments for FY 2020

VIII. Partnerships



Amarex Corporation

Alabama Association of Regional Councils Conference

Alabama Council for Developmental Disabilities

Alabama Community College Association

Alabama Counseling Association

Alabama Department of Corrections

Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources

Alabama Department of Public Health

Alabama Department of Human Resources

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services

Alabama Disability Advocacy Program

Alabama Easter Seals

Alabama Emergency Management Agency

Alabama Fire College Medical Needs Shelter

Alabama Head and Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund

Alabama Governor's Office

Alabama Governor's Youth Leadership Forum

Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council

Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind

Alabama Legislature

Alabama Lifespan Respite Coalition

Alabama Multiagency Feeding Plan

Alabama Statewide Assistive Technology Advisory Council

Alabama State Interagency Transition Team

Alabama State University

Alabama Transit Coalition

Alabaster Career Centers

Anniston Career Center

Auburn University

Birmingham Career Center

Birmingham Committee on ADA

Blind Advisory Committee

Brewton Career Center

Calhoun Community College

Camp ASCCA

Camp McDowell, Jasper

Central Alabama Community College

Cheaha State Park

Child Care Resources, Inc.

City of Auburn

City of Gulf Shores

Dallas County EMA

Deaf/Blind Coalition

Demopolis Career Center

Dothan Career Center

Disabilities Rights & Resources

Disability Resource Network

Family Voices of Alabama

Foley Career Center

Governor's Preparedness Conference

Governor's Summit on Disability Employment

Guntersville State Park

Gulf State Park

Home Medical Equipment Licensure Board

Huntsville Career Center

Is Able Center

Jacksonville State University

Jefferson County Personnel Board

Jefferson County Workforce Development

Joe Wheeler State Park

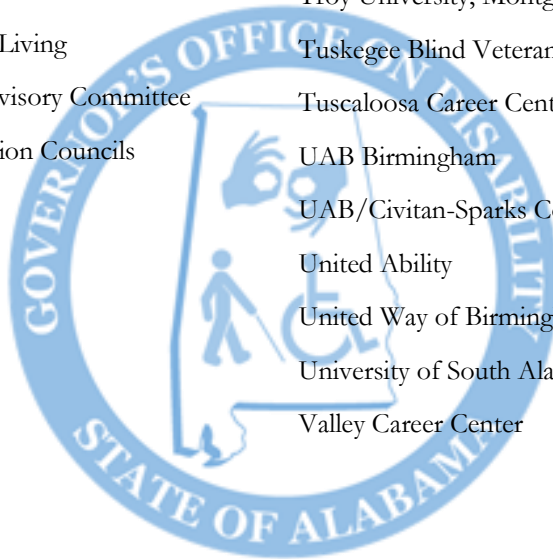
Lakeshore Foundation

Lee County Board of Education

Governor's Office on Disability
Goals and Accomplishments for FY 2020

VIII. Partnerships (Continued)

Long-term Care Rebalancing Committee (Medicaid Agency)	Sheffield Towne Plaza
Limestone County DHR	Shelton State Community College
Mass Care and Sheltering Taskforce	Southeast ADA Network Training Team
Maxwell Air Force Base	Sparks Clinic
Medicaid Infrastructure Grant	Special Education Advisory Panel
Mobile Army Corp of Engineers	State of Alabama Independent Living Council
Mobile Center for Independent Living	State Rehabilitation Council
Montevallo University	Trenholm State
Montgomery Career Center	Troy University, Montgomery and Troy Campuses
Montgomery Center for Independent Living	Tuskegee Blind Veterans Group
Montgomery Library for the Blind Advisory Committee	Tuscaloosa Career Center
National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils	UAB Birmingham
North Alabama Fair Housing Center	UAB/Civitan-Sparks Consumer Advisory Council
Oakville Indian Mounds	United Ability
OASIS Advisory Council	United Way of Birmingham
People First	University of South Alabama
Phenix City Career Center	Valley Career Center
Roanoke Career Center	





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Join The GOOD List

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